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Volume 37  
Issue 3 *September*

Article 16

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2010

## Review of *Why David Sometimes Wins*. Marshall Ganz. Reviewed by Ed Marakovitz.

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### Recommended Citation

Marakovitz, Ed (2010) "Review of *Why David Sometimes Wins*. Marshall Ganz. Reviewed by Ed Marakovitz.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 3 , Article 16.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol37/iss3/16>

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Marshall Ganz. *Why David Sometimes Wins*. Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009. \$34.95 hardcover.

Marshall Ganz was widely recognized during the Obama Presidential campaign as the architect of Camp Obama, the school for thousands of young organizers. Central to their training, and to the Obama campaign, was "telling your story." In *Why David Sometimes Wins*, Ganz demonstrates his own marvelous story telling skill in his narration of the farm workers' movement in America. Ganz, who teaches at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, joined Cesar Chavez and the fledgling farm workers union in 1965 as a volunteer. Eventually he rose to become the Director of Organizing and an Executive Board member.

Ganz sets out to answer three questions: "How can the powerless sometimes challenge the powerful successfully? How can strategic resourcefulness compensate for lack of resources? And how can we exercise leadership to turn what we have into what we need to get what we want?" The David referred to in the title is the Biblical David, he of the mighty sling shot. The California growers and the Teamsters alternate in the role of Goliath.

Ganz provides a history of organizing efforts with American farm workers beginning in 1900. The identities of the workers change in waves: the Japanese, Filipinos, Dust Bowl Whites, Mexican Braceros and, finally, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. He traces the labor movement's attempts at organizing farm workers from the International Workers of the World to the Teamsters. Most of the narrative is set in the 1960s and 1970s, and all the main players are there: the unions, Alinsky, the Civil Rights activists, the Catholic Church, college students, and, most of all, Mexican farm workers willing to put their lives on the line for their families and their fellow workers.

But interesting as the history may be, this book is really about organizing and, in particular, about strategy and tactics. Ganz writes an intriguing case history of how Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Gilbert Padilla and the other founders of the United Farm Workers built a union of 70,000 members, overcame incredible obstacles, out-organized the Teamsters, organized

several nationwide boycotts that involved millions of people and won victory after victory. Ganz's story reads like a novel and, though you may know how it turns out, you'll want to keep turning the pages to see what happens. At every turn the farm worker leaders faced crises, strategic dilemmas and threats to their very survival. We meet not only the farm worker leaders, but also scores of growers, Teamster and AFL-CIO organizers, and outside farm worker supporters. All is meticulously documented and referenced.

Ganz's thesis is that the United Farm Workers won because of superior "strategic capacity" based in an open leadership style that involves many people of different backgrounds, but especially those most affected by the movement, the farm workers themselves. He contrasts this with the top-down, conventional tactics of the growers and the Teamsters. Strategic capacity results in a synergism that fuels creativity and commitment. That's why David can win.

Here Ganz is less compelling but, nonetheless, thought provoking. There are many theories about why certain social change efforts succeed. They deal with power, internal and external forces and even timing. The 1960s were the perfect time for organizing the previously powerless. The nation was caught up in change. Many believed passionately in civil rights. Cross racial/ethnic coalitions were possible and strong. All this changed by the 1980s. The United Farm Workers gave up organizing and focused instead on affordable housing, social services, legislative advocacy and the campaign against pesticides. Chavez became a quasi-spiritual leader best known for his dramatic fasts. Union membership declined precipitously. Ganz argues that Chavez squandered the strategic capacity that had been painstakingly developed. But times had changed dramatically. The political pendulum had swung to the right. The labor movement was in decline.

This book is really not about Cesar Chavez. It's about organizing and tactics that work. Ganz describes them in a unique and interesting manner from his own vantage point within the farm workers' movement. *Why David Sometimes Wins* is a valuable resource for teachers and students of community organizing, labor history and the dynamics of social change.

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